



**June 20, 2003**

## **Telemarketer is sentenced for fraud**

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### **Ronald DeFusco defrauded elderly victims across the country by soliciting advance fees for nonexistent prizes**

A federal judge today sentenced **Ronald J. DeFusco**, 35, to 63 months in federal prison for telemarketing fraud. In January, DeFusco pleaded guilty to fraud charges, admitting that he bilked elderly victims by inducing advance fees from them for nonexistent prizes.

United States Attorney Margaret E. Curran, Kenneth R. Jones, Inspector in Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Kenneth W. Kaiser, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Narragansett Police Chief J. David Smith jointly announced the sentence, which Chief U.S. District Court Judge Ernest C. Torres imposed in U.S. District Court, Providence. Judge Torres also ordered DeFusco, formerly of Narragansett, to repay his victims \$218,989.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lee Vilker and Stephanie S. Browne summarized DeFusco's fraud scheme at a plea hearing in January and at today's sentencing. They said that DeFusco duped several elderly victims— and attempted to con more than 20 others — by telling them that they'd won cash prizes of \$75,000 or more. He persuaded his victims to send him advance fees that would ensure delivery of the prize.

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DeFusco persuaded an elderly victim in Puyallup, Washington, to send a fee of \$7,500 to an address in California to secure a \$75,000 prize. DeFusco called her again, said the prize was actually \$150,000, and asked for additional advance fees. The victim sent \$3,750 to an address on Stratford Avenue, Narragansett, that was across the street from where DeFusco was living, 17 Stratford Avenue. When the victim tried to send yet another \$3,750 in cash to the Narragansett address, the shipping company became suspicious and notified police in Puyallup, who contacted **Narragansett Police**.

Narragansett Police arranged for a controlled delivery of a package – supposedly containing the advance fee – to the given address on Stratford Avenue and arrested DeFusco’s wife, Janet DeFusco, as she picked up the package on April 5. Ronald DeFusco was arrested later that day.

#### **Other victims**

Additional investigation by the **Narragansett Police**, the **U.S. Postal Inspection Service**, and the **Federal Bureau of Investigation** identified six other victims who had been duped into sending DeFusco money in the “fee for prize” scam. DeFusco conned another victim out of \$10,500 by falsely promising to invest it for her. Agents tracked down more than 20 other individuals, all elderly, whom Defusco had solicited but who had not sent him money. DeFusco developed his targets from a “lead list,” which he obtained over the Internet, of elderly individuals who had previously entered sweepstakes contests.

**Enhanced penalty**

DeFusco pleaded guilty to 12 charges: conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud; three counts of mail fraud; seven counts of wire fraud; and one count of interstate transportation of stolen property. He was subject to an enhanced penalty because of the age and vulnerability of his victims.

The **U.S. Postal Inspection Service**, the **Federal Bureau of Investigation**, **Narragansett Police**, and police in **Puyallup, Washington** investigated the case. **United Parcel Service** and **Airborne Express** provided assistance.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Browne and Vilker prosecuted the case.

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